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GENDER ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY: TRADITION AND TRANSITION

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract. This article explores the evolution of gender roles within the family, tracing the historical context of traditional roles and examining the significant shifts that have occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries. Rooted in patriarchal structures, traditional family roles often assigned men as breadwinners and women as caretakers. However, social, economic, and political changes, including the women’s suffrage movement, the world wars, and the rise of feminism, have redefined these roles. The modern family is increasingly characterized by egalitarian dynamics, with both partners sharing responsibilities in the public and private spheres. This article also delves into contemporary issues such as the involved father, gender equality in household labor, and the impact of education on shaping more equitable family structures. Despite progress, challenges such as the unequal division of domestic labor persist, highlighting the ongoing journey toward true gender equality within the family. Through historical and modern lenses, this analysis underscores the complex interplay between tradition and transition in shaping gender roles.

INTRODUCTION

The family has long been considered the cornerstone of society, shaping not only individuals but also the values and norms of communities. One of the most significant aspects that has influenced family life throughout history is the concept of gender roles. Traditionally, gender roles within the family were clearly defined: men were seen as providers and protectors, while women were designated as caregivers and homemakers. However, these roles have undergone substantial transformations over time, leading to a redefinition of family dynamics in contemporary society.

Historical Context of Gender Roles

In traditional societies, gender roles within the family were rigidly structured. Men were responsible for earning a living and ensuring the family's security, while women managed the household and cared for children. This division of labor was largely influenced by social, cultural, and even religious norms that promoted a patriarchal family model. The idea that men and women have distinct, complementary roles was seen as natural, and deviation from these roles was often discouraged. Even in the 20th century, many families adhered to these gender roles. In industrialized societies, men typically worked outside the home in factories, offices, or other professional settings, while women were expected to remain at home, raising children and managing domestic duties. These traditional roles reinforced a male-dominated power structure, where men held authority over financial and decision-making aspects, while women were relegated to domestic spheres.

Gender roles within the family have been shaped by historical, cultural, and economic factors for centuries, often reflecting the broader social structures of the time. In many traditional societies, these roles were strongly influenced by the division of labor and the economic systems in place. Men and women were assigned specific roles based on biological, societal, and cultural factors, which reinforced a clear demarcation of responsibilities within the family unit.

In early human societies, survival was the primary concern, and roles were often divided based on physical strength and childbearing capacity. Men typically took on roles related to hunting, protection, and resource gathering, while women

were responsible for gathering food, cooking, and caring for children. This division was seen as practical rather than ideological, as both genders contributed to the survival of the group in complementary ways.

As societies began to settle and agriculture became more dominant, family structures also evolved. In agrarian societies, men typically worked the fields or engaged in labor-intensive farming, while women managed the home, raised children, and assisted with lighter agricultural tasks. The family, in this sense, was an economic unit, where the contributions of each gender were essential to the community's survival.

Religious and philosophical teachings played a significant role in shaping gender roles within the family. In many ancient cultures, religious doctrines codified gender differences, often placing men in positions of authority and relegating women to subordinate roles. For instance, in many ancient civilizations, such as Greece and Rome, women were legally and socially dependent on their husbands or fathers. In the Confucian tradition of East Asia, the family was seen as the foundation of social harmony, with men holding a dominant position as the heads of households, responsible for leadership, while women were expected to submit and maintain the household.

In Western religious traditions, especially within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, gender roles were also shaped by religious teachings. Biblical stories like that of Adam and Eve established a male-dominated order, with women often depicted as nurturers and men as providers and leaders. In Christianity, texts like those of the New Testament stressed that men were to love and lead their wives, while women were encouraged to submit to their husbands. This religious justification of gender roles persisted for centuries, becoming deeply ingrained in societal norms and expectations.

The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries brought significant economic and social changes that impacted gender roles within the family. Before industrialization, most families were involved in agrarian or home-based economies, where men and women both worked to support the household, albeit in different

capacities. However, the rise of factories and wage labor pulled men into the workforce outside the home, leaving women with an increasingly domestic role.

This period further cemented the notion of separate spheres: the public sphere, where men worked and earned income, and the private sphere, where women were responsible for caregiving, homemaking, and moral instruction. This idea of the "separate spheres" became particularly dominant in Western societies during the 19th century, reinforcing the concept of women as the "angel in the house," a nurturing figure who maintained the family's emotional and moral well-being.

Following World War II, particularly in Western countries like the United States, the ideal of the nuclear family – consisting of a working father, a homemaking mother, and children – became the dominant model. This period, often referred to as the "Golden Age" of the family, reflected a return to traditional gender roles after women's increased participation in the workforce during the war.

The 1950s saw a renewed emphasis on men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, a pattern strongly encouraged by the media, government policies, and economic structures that favored single-income families. Popular culture reinforced these roles through television shows and advertisements that idealized the suburban family, where men worked to provide for their families, and women managed the household and nurtured children.

In many non-Western and colonized societies, gender roles within the family were similarly influenced by a combination of traditional customs and external pressures from colonial powers. Indigenous family structures often varied, with some societies, such as certain Native American tribes, practicing matrilineal systems where women held more economic and social power. However, the imposition of Western patriarchal systems during the colonial period often shifted these dynamics, placing men in positions of authority and reducing the status of women within the family.

Colonialism and its aftermath also disrupted traditional gender roles through the introduction of Western education, Christianity, and legal systems, often pushing indigenous women into domestic roles while promoting Western ideals of

masculinity. This dynamic continues to influence gender relations in many post-colonial societies today, where traditional and modern gender roles often coexist in tension.

Shifts in Gender Roles in the 20th and 21st Century

The 20th century saw major societal changes that directly impacted gender roles within the family. The feminist movement, changes in labor laws, and increased access to education for women began to challenge the traditional male-dominated family structure. World Wars I and II were particularly influential as women entered the workforce in large numbers to fill roles left vacant by men who had gone to war. This shift demonstrated that women were capable of performing work traditionally reserved for men, leading to a reevaluation of their role within both the public and private spheres.

By the latter half of the 20th century, more women began to pursue higher education and professional careers, transforming the family dynamic. This shift was accompanied by growing recognition of shared responsibilities within the household. The "breadwinner-homemaker" model started to fade, and dual-income families became more common. Men were also increasingly encouraged to take on caregiving roles, such as participating in child-rearing and household chores, further blurring the lines of traditional gender expectations.

The 20th and 21st centuries witnessed profound shifts in gender roles within the family. As societies modernized and cultural, economic, and political changes swept the globe, traditional gender roles that had dominated family structures for centuries began to evolve. These transformations were driven by major historical events, social movements, and evolving attitudes toward gender equality.

The early 20th century was marked by the growing momentum of the women's suffrage movement, which sought equal voting rights and greater political participation for women. While not explicitly focused on the family, the movement set the stage for broader discussions about gender equality, including within the domestic sphere. Women's demand for political rights challenged the patriarchal

structure, in which men were seen as the heads of households and the primary decision-makers, both at home and in public life.

At the same time, industrialization continued to change family dynamics. Men were increasingly working in factories and offices, while women were generally confined to the domestic realm. However, the World Wars would soon disrupt this pattern, especially in the Western world.

While many women were expected to return to their domestic roles after the wars, the experience had a lasting impact. The notion that women could balance both work and family life began to gain traction. However, societal expectations and pressure to conform to traditional roles remained strong, particularly in the post-World War II era.

The post-World War II period, particularly in the 1950s, witnessed a reassertion of traditional gender roles. In many Western societies, there was a renewed emphasis on the nuclear family model, which featured a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. This was partly a response to economic prosperity, which allowed men to provide for their families on a single income, and women were encouraged to return to their domestic roles. The media and popular culture of the time reinforced these roles, with images of suburban family life depicting women as nurturing mothers and housewives.

This return to tradition, however, was not sustainable in the long term. The increasing participation of women in education and the workforce began to challenge the notion that a woman's place was solely in the home.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of radical social change that deeply impacted gender roles within the family. The second wave of feminism emerged as a powerful force advocating for gender equality in all areas of life, including the family. Feminists argued that traditional gender roles were oppressive to women and reinforced a patriarchal system that limited women's opportunities and autonomy.

This period saw major advancements in women's rights, including access to birth control, reproductive rights, and the push for equal pay in the workplace. The feminist movement emphasized the idea that women should have the choice to pursue

both careers and family life, and that men should share in domestic responsibilities, such as childcare and household chores.

At the same time, family structures began to change. The concept of the stay-at-home mother started to give way to the idea of the "working mother," and dual-income households became more common. These changes were not without challenges, as many women struggled to balance professional and family obligations, leading to ongoing discussions about the "double burden."

The shifts in women's roles also had an impact on men and their roles within the family. As women increasingly entered the workforce, the traditional role of men as sole providers began to shift. The late 20th century saw the emergence of new models of masculinity that embraced emotional expression, caregiving, and greater involvement in child-rearing. The concept of the "involved father" became more prominent, challenging the idea that men's primary contribution to the family was financial.

Stay-at-home fathers, while still a minority, became more visible, as did the idea that men should share in household responsibilities. This shift reflected broader cultural changes in how masculinity was defined, moving away from rigid, stoic models toward more flexible and emotionally engaged roles.

In the 21st century, the movement toward gender equality within the family has gained momentum, particularly in industrialized nations. The rise of feminist thought, changes in labor markets, and the impact of technology have all contributed to more egalitarian family structures. Today, it is increasingly common for both partners in a family to work outside the home and share responsibilities for childcare, household chores, and decision-making.

One significant shift in recent decades has been the increased focus on parental leave and policies that support work-life balance. In many countries, parental leave is no longer seen as the sole responsibility of mothers; fathers are also encouraged to take time off to bond with their children. Countries such as Sweden and Norway have pioneered policies that incentivize both parents to take parental leave, promoting a more balanced approach to family life.

In addition, the rise of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and telecommuting, has allowed for more equitable sharing of domestic duties. These changes have provided opportunities for both men and women to participate more fully in both professional and family life.

Despite these significant shifts, traditional gender roles still persist in many parts of the world and within certain social, cultural, and religious groups. Women often continue to bear a disproportionate share of household labor, even when they are employed full-time. The concept of the "double burden" remains a challenge for many working women, while societal expectations around masculinity can still limit men's full participation in caregiving roles.

Moreover, access to gender equality within the family varies widely across different regions. In some countries, patriarchal norms remain deeply entrenched, and women's participation in public and family life is restricted. Global disparities in gender equality continue to shape family roles in diverse ways.

The Modern Family and Gender Equality

Today, the concept of gender roles within the family continues to evolve. In many societies, particularly in Western cultures, families are moving toward more egalitarian structures. It is increasingly common to see both partners working outside the home and sharing domestic responsibilities equally. The rise of stay-at-home fathers, same-sex parenting, and single-parent households have all contributed to this diversification of family roles.

However, despite the progress toward gender equality, traditional gender roles persist in many parts of the world. In more conservative cultures, and even in certain sectors of progressive societies, expectations regarding gender roles within the family remain strong. Women are still often seen as the primary caregivers, even when they are also pursuing careers, leading to the so-called "double burden" of balancing work and home life. Men, on the other hand, may face societal pressures to conform to traditional notions of masculinity, which can limit their involvement in domestic tasks.

The concept of family has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, with a growing emphasis on gender equality reshaping how families function. The traditional roles of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers are no longer seen as the only valid family structure. Instead, the modern family is characterized by a more fluid and egalitarian approach, where both men and women share responsibilities in both public and private spheres.

One of the most visible shifts in modern family life is the rise of dual-income households, where both partners engage in paid employment. This change has been driven by several factors, including women's increased participation in higher education, the growing importance of dual incomes for maintaining economic stability, and shifting societal values toward gender equality.

In many contemporary families, both men and women contribute financially, and responsibilities such as child-rearing and household duties are increasingly shared. This evolution represents a significant departure from the post-World War II era when the idealized family structure revolved around a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. Today, egalitarian partnerships are more common, with both parents often balancing careers and caregiving.

However, while there has been progress in sharing responsibilities, the balance is not always equal. Studies show that women, even when working full-time, often take on a disproportionate share of domestic labor, including tasks like cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. This phenomenon, known as the "second shift," continues to pose challenges for achieving full gender equality within the family. Nevertheless, the growing recognition of this imbalance has led to more couples striving for a fairer division of labor at home.

As gender roles within the family evolve, the traditional expectations placed on men are also changing. The notion of the "involved father" has gained traction in recent decades, with many men embracing caregiving responsibilities and playing active roles in their children's upbringing. This shift reflects a broader redefinition of masculinity, where emotional engagement, nurturing, and shared domestic duties are increasingly valued.

Fathers in modern families are more likely to participate in tasks such as diaper changing, cooking, attending parent-teacher meetings, and engaging in daily routines with their children. Parental leave policies that encourage fathers to take time off after the birth of a child have contributed to this trend, especially in countries with progressive family policies like Sweden and Norway. These policies promote the idea that caregiving is a shared responsibility, rather than the sole domain of women.

This shift in paternal roles has numerous benefits, including stronger father-child bonds, greater emotional well-being for both partners, and the modeling of gender equality for children. By actively participating in family life, fathers can help to challenge stereotypes about traditional masculinity and create more balanced family dynamics.

While gender equality has advanced in many areas of family life, the division of household labor remains one of the most significant challenges. Despite women's increased participation in the workforce, they still bear the brunt of unpaid domestic work. Research consistently shows that women spend more time on housework and caregiving than men, even in dual-income households.

However, there is growing awareness of the need for a more equitable division of household labor. Couples today are more likely to discuss and negotiate shared responsibilities, and men are taking on more active roles in household management. Policies such as paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers, as well as access to affordable childcare, play a crucial role in alleviating the burden on women and promoting more balanced family dynamics.

In addition, there is a growing movement to challenge societal norms around "invisible labor" – the mental load of planning, organizing, and managing family life, which often falls disproportionately on women. By recognizing and addressing this aspect of domestic life, families can work toward a more equitable distribution of both physical and emotional labor.

Education and early socialization play a key role in shaping modern attitudes toward gender equality in the family. Gender norms are often passed down from generation to generation, influencing how children perceive their roles within the

household. However, schools, media, and parenting styles are increasingly challenging traditional gender stereotypes.

For example, gender-neutral parenting, where children are encouraged to explore interests and behaviors free from traditional gender expectations, has become more common. Parents may encourage both boys and girls to take part in cooking, cleaning, and caring for siblings, rather than assigning tasks based on gender. This helps to foster a sense of equality and shared responsibility from an early age, which can contribute to more balanced family dynamics in the future.

In schools, gender-sensitive curricula and teaching approaches that challenge stereotypes are essential in promoting gender equality. Educational programs that encourage collaboration, respect for diverse family structures, and the rejection of rigid gender norms can have a lasting impact on how future generations approach family life.

While significant progress has been made toward gender equality in the family, challenges remain. Achieving true equality requires continued efforts to dismantle societal expectations that reinforce traditional roles and promote policies that support work-life balance. Access to affordable childcare, parental leave, and workplace flexibility are all essential components for creating a more equitable family environment.

Moreover, gender equality within the family is deeply interconnected with broader societal changes. Addressing gender disparities in the workforce, closing the gender pay gap, and ensuring equal access to education and opportunities are crucial for fostering equality at home.

The modern family, with its diverse structures and evolving gender roles, offers a glimpse of a future where equality is possible. As societal attitudes continue to shift and more families embrace shared responsibilities, the potential for a more balanced and inclusive model of family life grows stronger. The next step is to ensure that this progress reaches all families, regardless of socioeconomic status, culture, or region, creating a more just and equitable world for future generations.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the key challenges in reshaping gender roles within the family is overcoming deeply ingrained stereotypes and societal expectations. Gender socialization from an early age influences how individuals perceive their roles within the family, and these perceptions are often reinforced by media, culture, and religion. This creates barriers to change, particularly for those who wish to adopt non-traditional roles.

However, there are also significant opportunities to promote gender equality within the family. Encouraging open dialogue about expectations, supporting policies that promote parental leave for both mothers and fathers, and fostering educational programs that challenge gender stereotypes are all crucial steps. The rise of flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and part-time employment, also provides an avenue for parents to share caregiving duties more equally.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of gender roles within the family reflects broader societal shifts toward equality and shared responsibility. While traditional roles may still exist in some contexts, there is a growing recognition that both men and women can contribute equally to both the financial and emotional well-being of the family. As family structures continue to diversify and adapt to modern realities, gender roles will likely keep evolving, offering a more balanced and inclusive model for future generations.

The historical context of gender roles within the family has been marked by a clear division of labor, shaped by societal needs, economic structures, and cultural values. While traditional gender roles were often seen as natural and immutable, they were in fact deeply influenced by the demands of each era. From the practical divisions of labor in early societies to the religiously and economically reinforced roles of men and women in modern history, the family has been a microcosm of broader social and gender hierarchies.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen significant shifts in gender roles within the family, reflecting broader societal movements toward equality and shared responsibilities. While much progress has been made, particularly in industrialized

nations, the journey toward fully egalitarian family structures is ongoing. As societies continue to evolve, so too will the understanding and expression of gender roles within the family, offering the potential for more balanced and inclusive models for future generations.

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